

Winter Use Plan Supplemental EIS

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yellowstone & Grand Teton National Parks
and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Pkwy



November 12, 2002

Fact Sheet - Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Background: On November 12, 2002 the Internal Review Draft of the Supplemental EIS will be released to the States and Counties serving as Cooperating Agencies with the National Park Service. This has been a significant issue for the past decade and has always generated extensive interest; in recent years, that attention has been even more focused, controversial, and contentious. The November, 2000 Record of Decision (for the Winter Use Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)) calling for the elimination of recreational snowmobile and snowplane use by the winter of 2003-2004 resulted in a lawsuit brought by the snowmobile industry and others asking that the decision be set aside. A settlement agreement resulted in the National Park Service undertaking a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) soliciting more public comment and consideration of any new or updated substantive information not available at the time of the earlier decision (especially as it related to new snowmobile technology).

Goals for Winter Use: Goals for winter use in Yellowstone, Grand Teton and the Parkway remain the same, as does the commitment to achieving them. Winter use must be one of shared stewardship. We will work closely with local governments and businesses, concessioners, conservation and other interest groups, industry, park visitors and the public to build a sustainable future that will allow for both snowmobile and snowcoach use while preserving park resources and providing a high quality visitor experience.

- ☐ Provide a high quality, safe and educational winter experience for all visitors
- ☐ Provide for visitor and employee health and safety
- ☐ Preserve pristine air quality
- ☐ Preserve natural soundscapes
- ☐ Mitigate impacts to wildlife
- ☐ Minimize adverse economic impacts to gateway communities

Preferred Alternative: The framework for the preferred alternative for a sustainable future is now in the public arena, having been presented to the Cooperating Agencies in Cody, Wyoming on June 25, 2002. Details of the preferred alternative (the direction the National Park Service intends to take) will be presented to the public in the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on February 19, 2003. The framework, as well as the details, are a package, that must be carried forward completely, with all components inextricably tied together. The principle components of the package are:

- ☐ Reduced numbers of snowmobiles through **Daily Limits**
- ☐ Implementing **Best Available Technology** requirements for snowmobiles
- ☐ Implementation of an **Adaptive Management** Program
- ☐ Access is **Guided**, both snowmobiles and snowcoaches
- ☐ **Phase-in** is reasonable and shared with the communities
- ☐ A new generation of **Snowcoaches** are developed as a key to winter transportation
- ☐ **Funding** is available for implementation

Daily Limits

- ☐ The December 18, 2000 Proposed Rule (*Federal Register*, Vol. 65, No. 243) stated - "If the NPS were to continue to allow snowmobiles in the parks...it would be necessary to establish very strict limitations on that use to remain consistent with the NPS Organic Act [and] the relevant executive orders...."
- ☐ Snowmobile numbers could increase or decrease slightly over the existing historic average. Peak use would be dramatically reduced, and some use would be directed away from the heavily impacted West Yellowstone to Old Faithful corridor.
- ☐ Total actual average daily use will be capped at the historical average for West Entrance and allow for minor growth and redistribution of use at the other entrances.
- ☐ Key indicator of visitor experience is the condition of the oversnow roads, snowmobile numbers effect oversnow road conditions.
- ☐ Initial snowmobile daily limits are: North Entrance (Mammoth Terraces), 50; West Entrance, 550; East Entrance, 100; South Entrance, 250; Continental Snowmobile Divide Trail, 75; and Grassy Lake Road, 75. Total: 1,100.

Best Available Technology

- ❑ Best Available Technology (BAT) will ensure that oversnow vehicles are the cleanest and quietest possible under today's technology.
- ❑ NPS will work with manufacturers to develop snowmobiles that will reduce pollutants and sound - striving for continuous improvement.
- ❑ Current snowmobile BAT is believed to be the production, 4-stroke snowmobiles produced by Arctic Cat and Polaris (and possibly others).
- ❑ For the winter of 2003/2004 NPS would set BAT as any snowmobile that is capable of reducing hydrocarbon emissions by 90 percent and carbon monoxide emissions by 70 percent.

Adaptive Management

- ❑ The objectives for monitoring and adaptive management are to assess the short and long-term effects of management actions on park resources.
- ❑ Specific standards are set for each winter management zone.
- ❑ The SEIS will prescribe monitoring standards, methods and management actions for critical resources in winter management Zone 3, (the zone that snowmobiles and snowcoaches will travel within).
- ❑ For each indicator, a standard either exists or is hypothesized (for adaptive management).
- ❑ Each indicator and monitoring method and intensity is prescribed.
- ❑ Management actions are implemented if the standards should be exceeded.
- ❑ The NPS will establish an "open forum" strategy for the dissemination of monitoring results, technical expertise, monitoring techniques and results of peer review.

Guided Access

- ❑ Training will be required for both commercial and non-commercial guides
- ❑ Guided trips assure compliance with park rules and regulations.
- ❑ Guides will be trained to avoid conflict with wildlife.
- ❑ Starting with 20% non-commercially, guided use is a reasonable way to test a model during the phase-in period, including a training program for certification.
- ❑ Adaptive management techniques would be applied as experience is gained to adjust numbers within the limits as appropriate.

Phase-in: Over the course of two to three winter use seasons, the components of the new winter use plan would be implemented. A phase-in period allows communities, permittees, visitors, and concessioners time to adapt. During the phase-in period, existing commercial snowcoach operators would be encouraged to continue to increase their fleet size and snowmobile and other new operators will be encouraged to purchase coaches, achieve reduced snowmobile numbers, and shift to cleaner and quieter snowmobiles.

- ❑ Year 1 (2003/2004)
 - Implement daily limits
 - Comprehensive monitoring program underway
 - Commercially guided operations required to be BAT
 - Encourage rentals and private snowmobiles to be BAT
 - Complete concession contracting for commercially guided operations
 - Training program in place for non-commercial guides
 - Propose changes for following winter
- ❑ Year 2 (2004/2005)
 - Retain daily limits
 - Comprehensive Monitoring program continues
 - All snowmobile entries to be guided (80%/20%)
 - All snowmobile entries to be BAT
 - Propose changes for following winter
- ❑ Year 3 (2005/2006)
 - Implement changes, if required with regard to guiding, BAT, limits, monitoring program, hours of operation, etc.

Snowcoach Development

- ❑ Continue to support and help fund the current research and development for new snowcoach technology as an essential component of the package.
- ❑ Support exploration of ways to fund purchase of an initial fleet of new snowcoach vehicles through DOE, DOT, and FHWA grants.
- ❑ All snowcoaches must meet BAT standards.

Funding: The National Park Service is seeking operational funding as well as one-time funds to focus on enhanced winter operations, to implement a comprehensive monitoring program, to replace equipment, and to continue with research and development of the next-generation of snowcoachs.

Process: Public comment ended on the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) on May 29, 2002. The National Park Service has been evaluating and developing responses to the comments, revising alternatives that were presented in the DSEIS, developing and analyzing a preferred alternative, re-analyzing all alternatives based on comments received during the public comment period, and developing the FSEIS document. The Internal Review Draft of the FSEIS that is currently being reviewed by the Cooperating Agencies as well the National Park Service and Department of the Interior is a pre-decisional working draft that will not be available to the public until February 19, 2002. The Preferred Alternative that is presented in the Internal Draft SEIS is not a decision, nor necessarily the final version of the Preferred Alternative that will appear in the FSEIS. The FSEIS that is available on February 19, 2003 will also contain numerous edits, updates, and changes to what is currently on internal review.

Schedule

- ❑ Record of Decision (ROD) to phase out snowmobile use in the three parks published November 22, 2000
- ❑ Final rule, implementing ROD, issued January 22, 2001
- ❑ A *Federal Register* notice delays final rule for 60 days
- ❑ International Snowmobile Manufacturers, and others, file lawsuit in December, 2000, asking that the November 2000 ROD be set aside
- ❑ Final rule becomes effective on April 22, 2001
- ❑ Settlement Agreement finalized June 29, 2001
- ❑ The Settlement Agreement called for all this to be done by December 2002, before implementation of the snowmobile limits that were to be effective the winter of 2002/2003 (as detailed in the existing rule).
- ❑ The DSEIS was released on March 29, 2002, and open for public comment until May 29, 2002. No Preferred Alternative was presented in the DSEIS
- ❑ Proposed "delaying" rule published on March 29, 2002, specifics include what will be delayed and what will be implemented in the winter of 2002/2003
- ❑ A requested extension is approved to effectively analyze the more than 350,000 public comments received on the DSEIS. The ROD will now be published on March 21, 2003
- ❑ November 12, 2002 - Commence review of Internal Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS)
- ❑ November 15, 2002 - Final Rule delaying phase-out of snowmobiles published
- ❑ December 10, 2002 - Cooperating agency meeting in Idaho Falls, Idaho
- ❑ February 19, 2003 - FSEIS available to public
- ❑ March 21, 2003 - ROD published in Federal Register
- ❑ April, 2003 - Commence rule-making to implement ROD

A Final Note

Critical elements of the framework include: best available technology (BAT); a reduction in numbers of snowmobiles while maintaining historic visitor use numbers; an adaptive management program; guided snowmobile use; a reasonable phase-in period; and funding to effectively manage the winter use program. All of the critical elements must be implemented as a package to allow us to address the adverse impacts identified in the November 2000 ROD.

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- ❑ **Phase-in** is reasonable and shared with the communities
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